

Who, what, that, which... (simplified)

I. Noun clauses

In this case, **the pronoun refers to nothing in the sentence**

Also, **there is no comma before the pronoun** (who or what)!

♣ In this meaning, the pronouns **what**, **who (whom)** can be used (and where, when etc.).

For **a person**, **who (whom)** can be used, while for **animals** (usually), **plants** and **things** **what** is used.

♣ **Such clauses are equivalent to a noun.** In the examples noun clauses and nouns (noun phrases) are underlined:

Give me what is on the table. = Give me the cup.

What is on the table is mine. = The book is mine.

Show me where you live. = Show me the house.

Show me who did this. = Show me the child.

Tell me when you got home. = Tell me the time.

I didn't know what was wrong with the computer. = I didn't know the problem.

♣ Be careful! A statement does not start with *who* (except in some rare cases).

In this example, we had to find a different word instead of “who”:

~~Who is here gets a cookie.~~

Whoever is here gets a cookie.

Anyone who is here gets a cookie.

II.1. Defining relative clauses

Here, the clause refers to a noun/pronoun before it. Such clauses are called *relative clauses*. In this case, we can call them *defining relative clauses* or *restrictive relative clauses*, because they “**define**” the noun in front of them—they usually answer question “**which**”. They either define the noun/pronoun precisely, or if not precisely, they at least significantly narrow the range of possibilities.

♣ In this case, **there is no comma before the pronoun!**

♣ The following pronouns can be used here:

for **a person**, **that** and **who (whom)** can be used, and they can sometimes be omitted

for **non-humans**, **that** and **which** are used and can sometimes be omitted

Examples:

Give me the book that/ which is on the table.

Dolores is the girl that Pete loves.

The book that/which is on the table is very expensive.

This is the house that/which we live in.

Where is the book that/which I bought yesterday?

Show me the girl who/that helped you.

Maya is the girl that/who/whom I love.

This is the girl that/who/whom I work with.

He is a boy who/that goes to that school.

♣ **After a preposition**, only use **which** (for animals, plants and things)!

This is the house **in which** we live.

After a preposition only use **whom** (for a person or people)!

This is the girl **with whom** I work.

After a preposition **who** is also possible if the question consists of only two words: the preposition and who:
With who? (colloquial) = **With whom?** (formal)
For who? (colloquial) = **For whom?** (formal)

II. 2.a Non-defining relative clauses

Here too, the subordinate clause refers to a noun/pronoun before it. Such clauses are called *relative clauses*. In this case, we can call them *non-defining relative clauses* or *nonrestrictive relative clauses*, because they do not define the noun in front of them (they do not answer the question “**which?**”), **because we know exactly which... even without the relative clause**.

♣ The following pronouns can be used here:

for **a person, who (whom)**

for **non-humans, which**

♣ In this case **there is a comma before the pronoun, or the entire clause is between commas**

Give me my ID card, which is on the table. (I have one ID card)

My car, which is pink, is a very nice car. (I have one car)

His mother, who is 100 years old, can swim quite well. (He has one mother)

Look at Maya, who is the most beautiful girl in the class. (In this class, there is only one Maya)

♣ Only **which** or **whom** can be used **after a preposition**.

*This is their garden, **in which** they grow grass.*

*This is Hagatha, **with whom** I work.*

II. 2.b Sentential relative clauses

Here, the subordinate clause refers to a “sentence” (main clause) before it.

Only **which** can be used here and it **must be preceded by a comma**.

I had to get up at six o'clock, which was terrible.

It applies to the whole main clause. (It wasn't *six o'clock* that was terrible!)

I was an hour late for work yesterday, which made the boss cry.

(It wasn't yesterday that made the boss cry, but that I was late.)

SOME EXTRA STUFF

♣ **Whose** can also be used for inanimate things, either in a defining or non-defining sense!

Examples:

*This is the girl **whose** father is a millionaire.*

*This is Maya, **whose** father is a hitman.*

*This is the house **whose** windows were broken yesterday.*

*This is Joe's house, **whose** windows were broken yesterday.*